Drama-Based Activities
to Improve Student Confidence and Motivation

This webinar will present a wealth of resources that teachers need to begin using drama in their EFL classrooms to improve student engagement and confidence, including practical, classroom-tested and evidence-based approaches.

- Using improv and acting techniques in language instruction can seem daunting for teachers who are not familiar with these approaches or feel they are either outside of their comfort zones or frivolous.

- In this workshop, taught by the authors of *Drama in the Language Classroom,* you will learn about fun, evidence-based practices that can be applied in any classroom setting.

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Drs. Carmela Romano Gillette and Deric McNish

Carmela is a Lecturer in the University of Michigan's English Language Institute. She earned a PhD in Literacy Education from Oakland University, a Master's in TESOL from Arizona State University, and a BA in Theatre and English. She has taught English for over 25 years in multiple contexts, including adult education and community programs, corporate settings, tutoring, community colleges, and universities.

Deric is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Michigan State University (MSU), a Senior Editor of the *International Dialects of English Archive*, and a Certified Teacher of Knight-Thompson Speechwork. He earned a PhD from the University of Colorado Boulder and an MFA from Case Western Reserve University. He has taught drama-based English language courses at the University of Michigan's English Language Institute and MSU's English Language Center.

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Drama-Based Activities
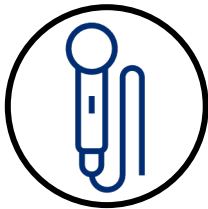# to Improve Student Confidence and Motivation

In this session, we will…

- …explore the *benefits* of performance activities in the language classroom.

- …demonstrate how to use *theatre games and warm-ups* for confidence and motivation.
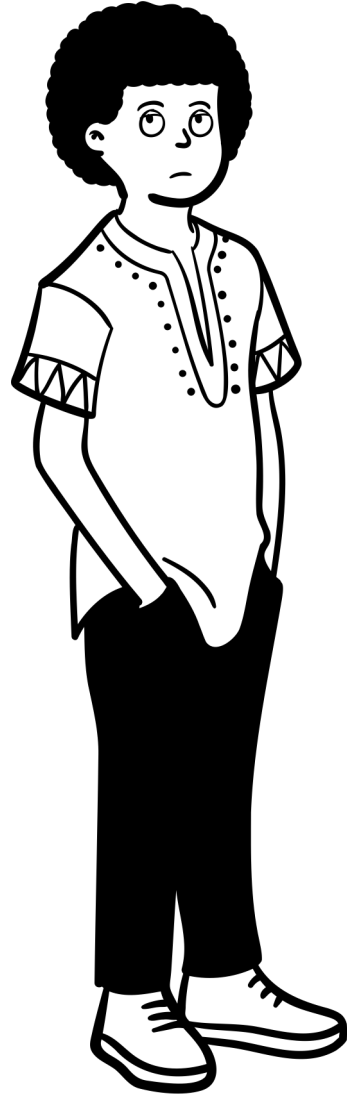
- …provide tools for teaching *improv for* authentic language use.

- …share *blank scenes* for creative expression and paralinguistic communication.

Question!

Do you think your personality changes when you use different languages? If yes, in what ways?

Share your thoughts in the chat.

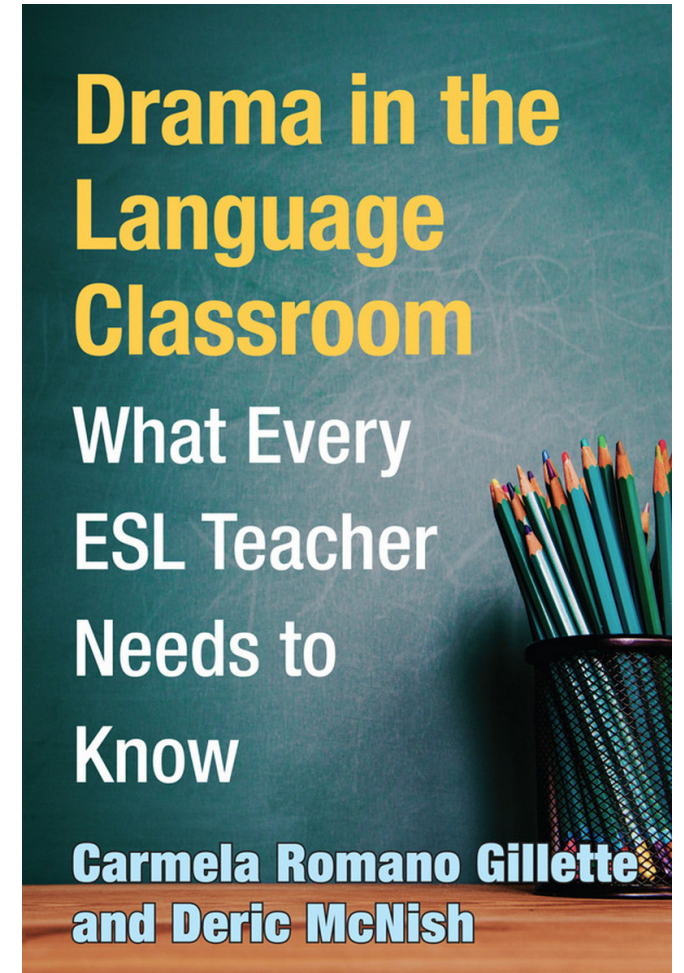# Part One: Performing Fluency

We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing.

\- Charles Schaefer, psychologist

Fundamentals: Performing Fluency

- Based on acting theory and training

- Makes use of activities that actors use to prepare to play a role

- An educational philosophy centered on linguistic theory and acting theory involving:

  - Making choices about how we use English

- Creating a community of learners

  - We recognize that support and connection are more important than control

  - We work together to make good choices

Drama in the Language Classroom
What Every ESL Teacher Needs to Know
Carmela Romano Gillette and Deric McNish

Theoretical Framework

- **Drama as evidence-based practice** (Gomez, D.I., 2010; Liu, J., 2002; Piazzoli, E., 2011; Sirisrimangkorn, L. & Suwanthep, J., 2013; Winston, J & Stinson, M., 2014)

- **Learning, language/culture and context are inseparable** (Fránquiz, M. E. & Salinas, C., 2013; Kramsch, 2013; Larsen-Freeman, D., 2015; Lessard-Clouston, 2016)

- **Language and identity** (Darvin, R. & Norton, B., 2015; Kobayashi, M., Zappa-Hollman, S., & Duff, P., 2017)

In Practice

- A pedagogical approach, a way of being (not just activities borrowed from acting)

- Playing a role is central

- A deeper look at the ways we use language to achieve particular goals

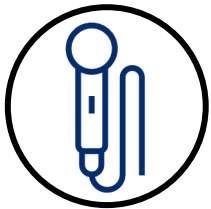- Cultural conversations arise organically from performance and reflection
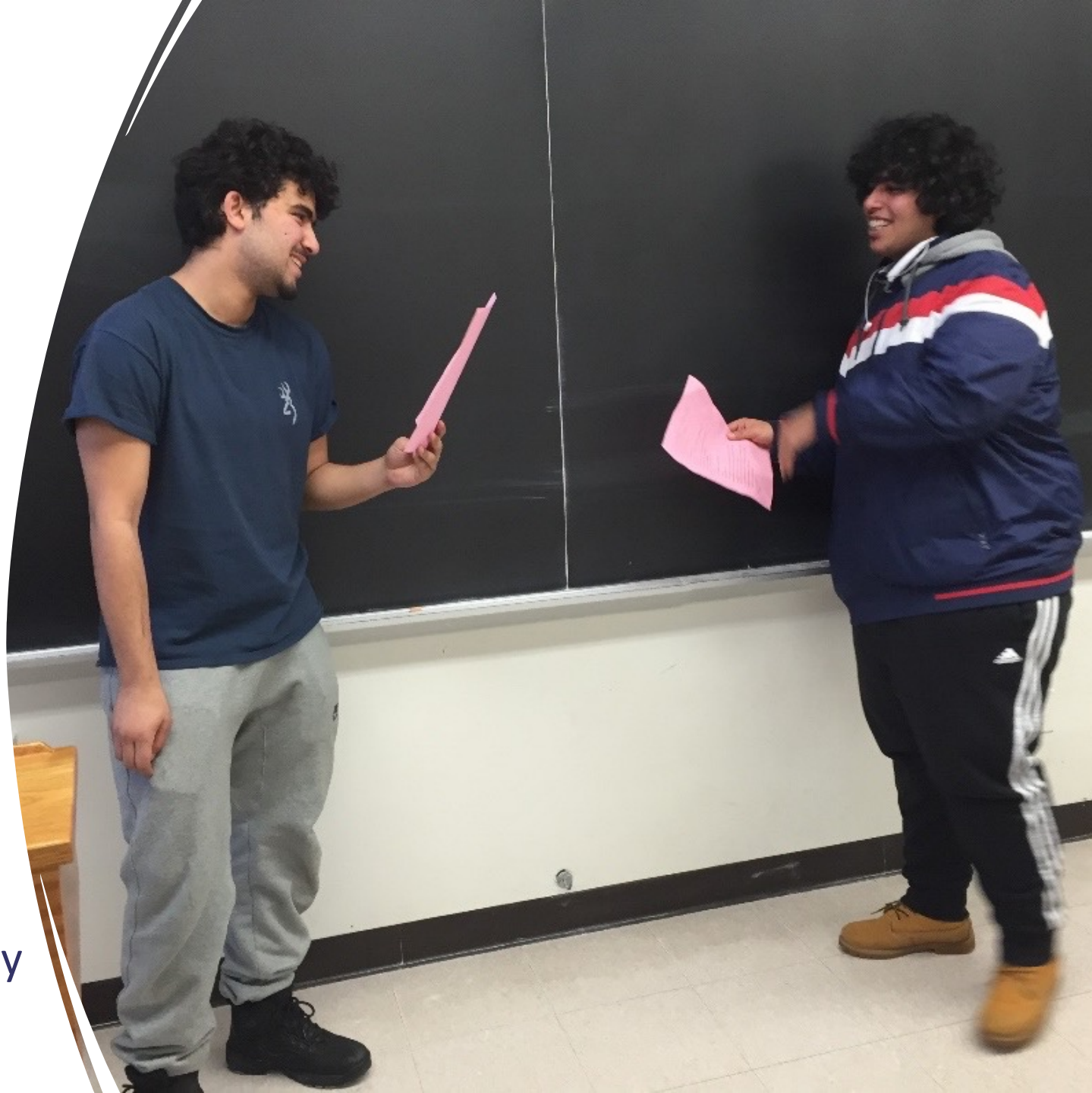
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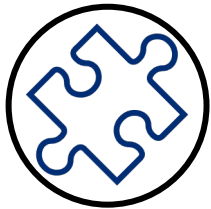
…demonstrate how to use *theatre games and warm-ups* for confidence and motivation.

…provide tools for teaching *improv for* authentic language use.

…share *blank scenes* for creative expression and paralinguistic communication.

Question!

Do you get nervous when you are speaking in front of a group of people, especially when speaking in different languages?

Share your thoughts in the chat.

Part Two: Theatre Games and Warmup

There are two types of speakers: Those who get nervous and those who are liars.

- Mark Twain, writer

Theatre Games and Warm-Ups

- Provide opportunities for Task-Based Learning
    - Active language use is essential for learning

- Help lower the affective filter
    - Example affective filters: fear, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, alienation

- The goal is "Relaxed Readiness"

- Fun for all ages!

Why Play Theatre Games?

- Ensemble Building

- Class Participation

- Problem Solving

- Focus

- Breaking the Ice

- Fun!

Game Example:
Sound and Movement

Variation 1: Names

- Stand in a circle
- Speak your name while making a physical gesture
- "My name is Deric, I like to run, so..."
- Everyone repeats in unison
- Next person

Game Example:
Sound and Movement

Variation 2: The Spotlight

- Stand in a circle
- Point to a random person across from you in the circle
- Speak a nonsense/gibberish word while making a silly movement
- That person repeats what you did, then points to a new partner, and continues the pattern

Game Example:
Sound and Movement

Variation 3:
Exaggeration Circle

- Stand in a circle
- Speak a phrase and make a gesture
    - "I'm hungry." while patting the stomach
- The next person repeats, but with some kind of physical and/or vocal exaggeration
- Continue around the circle

Tips

- Be Consistent

- Student Buy-In

- Competition

- Side Coaching

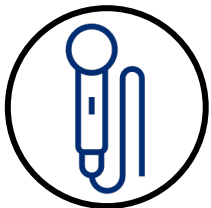- Adapting for online work: "Compliment Circle"

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Question!

How do you feel about playing theatre games like these in the classroom?

Share your thoughts in the chat.

Part Three: Improv

There are no mistakes, only opportunities.

- Tina Fey, actor

Improv Intro

- Roleplays
- What is improv?
    - Spontaneous (no script)
    - Practice with authentic situations

Improv Tools

- "Yes, and…" - accept what you are given
- You don't have to be funny!
- Participation of the "audience" - provide initiation and observations

Examples

- Yes, and...

- One Sentence Story

  - One Word Story

A: I'm sorry, but there's no way I can finish my assignment on time. Can I have an extension?

B: Yes, and ...

Share your response in the chat.

Examples

- Yes, and…

- One Sentence Story

  - One Word Story

Tips

- Stick with "Yes, and…"

- Repetition helps.

- Funny is optional.

- Encourage play-acting.

- Connect to your learning goals.

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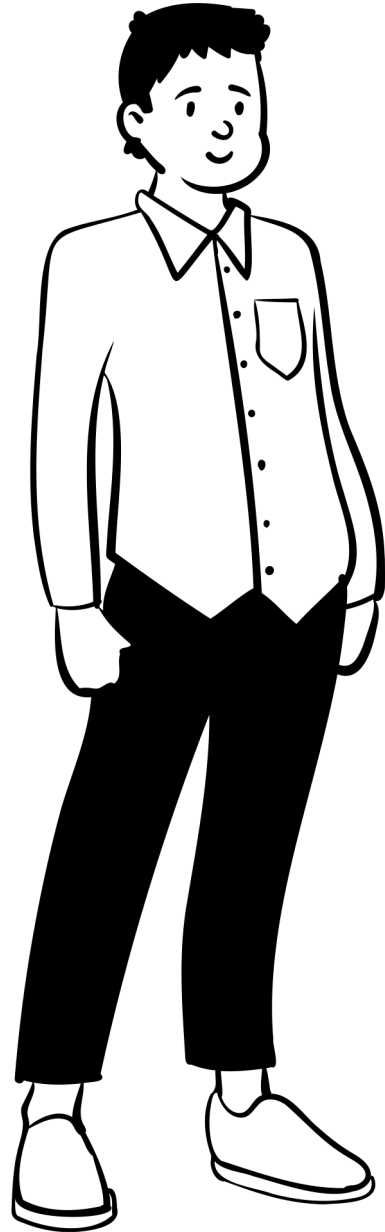
- …provide tools for teaching *improv for* authentic language use.

- …share *blank scenes* for creative expression and paralinguistic communication.

Question!

How do you teach paralinguistic features of language like stress and intonation?

Share your ideas in the chat.

Part Four:
Blank Scenes

It's not what you say. It's how you say it.

\- Mae West, Actor

Blank Scenes

- Blank scenes, or "contentless" scenes – scripts with vague text that can be interpreted multiple ways

- Used to demonstrate the importance of the paralinguistic features of language, like tone and body language

- Students make choices about who they are (character), where they are (setting), what's happening (plot), including any obstacles or conflict in the scene.

- They are performed and the audience (rest of the class) must guess who they are and what is happening.

Blank Scene - Example

A: This is my thing.

B: No.

A: Yes.

B: It's always your thing.

A: Should I even mention…

B: Ok. Yes. Ok. This is your thing.

Blank Scenes In Practice

Please put your answers to the question below in the chat.

Who are these characters and what is their relationship to each other?

A: This is my thing.

B: No.

A: Yes.

B: It's always your thing.

A: Should I even mention…

B: Ok. Yes. Ok. This is your thing.

Blank Scenes In Practice

Questions for your students:

- Who are these characters and what do they hope to accomplish? What is their relationship to each other? What kind of conflict might exist between them?

- Where are they now? How might this have an impact on the characters?

- What is happening in the scene?

- How would you communicate all of this with just the text provided?

A: This is my thing.

B: No.

A: Yes.

B: It's always your thing.

A: Should I even mention…

B: Ok. Yes. Ok. This is your thing.

Tips

- Write your own blank scenes to fit your class needs and goals

- Include vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar features you'd like to practice

- Focus on particular paralinguistic features for emphasis

Notes on Adaptations

For any of these activities, you want to consider your context

- Organize the task according to the time you have

- Make accommodations for students based on levels

- Break up activities for large classes

- Use the tools provided by the platform in online classes

- Formative / informal evaluation is best

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Let's stop and reflect!

Now that you know more about using drama-based teaching, do you feel that this approach could be incorporated into what you are already doing in your classroom?

Share your responses in the chat.

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Thank you!

Questions or concerns?

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Reflection Questions

1. How might you use or adapt the drama activities demonstrated in the webinar in your classroom?

2. Do you think your students will be excited to try these drama activities? If not, how might you explain or demonstrate their benefits?

3. Why might improv (improvisation) activities be particularly helpful for language learners?

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